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THE ATLANTIC EXTRA

THE BLACK DEPARTERS

An Adventure in Greece

BY PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR

114 PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR *was one of two young British officers who led one of the most spectacular individual exploits of World War II. Wearing the uniform of German raincoats, they kidnapped a German general, hid him in the hills of Crete, eluded weeks of search by the Germans, and delivered him to* [107] *the British command at Cairo. Here Mr. Fermor tells of his adventures with the Sarakatsáns, a group of nomads who wander over northern Greece.*

[p. 73-A]

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G 114 [103] PERHAPS because it was my first Greek town after a few years of absence, I had taken a strong liking to Alexandroupolis. Large as it is, there is nothing overpoweringly polished about the citizens of this Thracian town; rather the reverse. G 517 275 Many of the limitations of a new provincial town pervade it; and the long evening hours of the officers and civil servants sitting in the *kaphenia* are spanned by familiar anecdotes and yawns and yet another coffee. The tedium of unchosen and unchanging company lurks there, and for some fastidious ones, the acute pain of listening to the same jokes and the same stories again and again.

S 484 291 All at once, however, the boredom of the dusty evening street was halted by the passing of a wild, solitary, and alien figure that no streets or houses should ever have confined; it was a presence as inappropriate in these tame surroundings as a wolf in a main street of Byzantium. A rough black pillbox was tilted askew on his matted and whiskered head. He wore a black double-breasted waistcoat of homespun goat's hair, tucked into a black sash, below which a hairy and broad-pleated black kilt jutted stiffly to his knees. Black tights of the same stifling stuff covered his long legs, and he was shod in those Greek mountain shoes which turn up at the tip and curl back in a broad canoelike prow and end in a wide black

[p. 73-B]

pompon covering the front of the foot. The thick soles were clouted, and the nails grated underfoot. Gazing straight ahead, he loped along the middle of the road, as though to keep as far as possible from the contaminating houses. A long shepherd's staff, whose crook was a tortuously carved wooden snake, was laid across his shoulders. His arms were looped over it in the cruciform position in which many mountaineers carry their crooks and their guns. He was a Sarakatsán. Heads turned as he passed, and the smack of cards and the clatter of backgammon counters died down for a few moments. I got up and dogged his steps at a discreet distance.

Sarakatsáns have always filled me with awe. I first saw these primeval Greek nomads years ago when I was walking across Bulgaria, on my way to Constantinople. A gathering of beehive-shaped huts were scattered over the wintry hills slanting to the Black Sea. Brushwood folds ran up the green slopes, and thousands of shaggy black goats and sheep grazed over the rainy landscape, their heavy bronze bells filling the air with a many-toned and harmonious jangle. Here and there among them, like dark monoliths under the wheeling crows, their herdsmen leaned on their lance-long crooks; their faces were almost lost in the deep hoods of high-shouldered goat's-hair capes that

reached to the ground, capes of so coarse a weave and so stiff with rain that they looked as though their incumbents could almost step forth and leave them standing like sentry boxes. I next saw them in March the following year, when I was riding across Greek Macedonia and stayed a night in one of their smoky wigwams. Since then I had seen them again and again, all over northern Greece, in the plains in winter and in the mountains in summer, but always on the skyline or in the middle distance. True nomads, these self-appointed Ishmaels hover on the outskirts of ordinary Greek life as fleetingly as a mirage, only manifesting themselves to ordinary mortals in far-away glimpses. Suddenly, at a ravine's twist far from the scorched lowlands, one comes across their impermanent hamlets of conical huts on high ledges of the Pindus and the Rhodope mountains and in the sierras of Roumeli; and in winter, gazing down from the snows that have banished them, one can discern their clustering huts in the plains, the ascending smoke, and the slowly grazing flocks.

Every spring their beasts and their long caravans of horses, laden with all they possess, can be seen winding up into the thawed mountains, or halted around a sudden village of somber tents, to stream downhill again later to the withered autumnal plains which the rains will soon turn green. One discovers them binding lopped branches and osier twigs into the hemispherical skeletons of the huts which will house them for the season; shelters whose blackened and molting thatch will later mark where they have settled for a few months and vanished from again. Sometimes a far-off barking and the murmur of bells hint at their presence deep in the ilex woods or along a dazzling canyon where nothing stirs except, perhaps, a pair of floating eagles. Besides these rare apparitions, this fugitive community of about eighty thousand souls and of flocks amounting to several million head seems to have the gift of invisibility.

UNLIKE the seminomads of Greece — the Koutzovlachs and the Karagounis, who all have mountain villages from which to migrate and to which they return after their half-yearly journeys in search of winter pasture — the Sarakatsáns have nothing more solid than their abodes of wicker and rush. All of them, however, look to some range of mountains, some fold or cordillera where they have grazed their flocks for centuries of summers, as their home. Their lowland pastures are more variable, an uncertain sojourn with few claims on their allegiance. At the turn of the century the Sarakatsáns of northern Greece were the

195 221 131 nomads with the widest range of migration. The sudden cage of new frontiers which sprang up after the Balkan Wars failed to confine them, and they would fan out in autumn, from Epirus and Macedonia, all over southern Albania and across the lower marches of Serbia as far as Montenegro and Herzegovina and Bosnia and into Bulgaria, to the foothills of the great Balkans.

Those Sarakatsáns who thought of the Rhodope Mountains as their home were particularly bold in the extent of their winter wanderings. Not only would they expand northward, as they had in those first outposts which I saw years ago along the coasts of the Black Sea, but before the Hebrus River became the inviolable border of Turkey their autumnal caravans would reach Constantinople, and up would go their wigwams under the walls of Theodosius. Others would settle along the shores of the Sea of Marmara, looking out toward the islands of the Propontis. Yet others would spread over the rich green hills of the Dardanelles, and many would cross the Hellespont and pitch their camps on the plain of Troy. The boldest of all would continue their journey to the meadows of Bithynia, wintering there among the poplar trees, or pushing on further into Cappadocia as far as Caesaraea, scattering their flocks across the volcanic wildernesses around the empty rock monasteries of Ürgüb, or even as far as Iconium, the home of Jellalludin and the metropolis of the whirling dervishes.

195 131 221 101 Enormous though these journeys were, they were scarcely looked upon as expatriation; for, until the mass deracination of the 1920s, much of Asia Minor was still part of the Greek world, and even beyond its confines, ancient Greek colonies, established for thousands of years but reduced by the later tide of invading Seldjuk Turks to scattered islets of Hellenism, still survived and prospered. There the invisible frontiers of nomadism overlapped and dovetailed into those of other pastoral wanderers, the Yourouks, autochthonous Anatolian shepherds who had grazed their flocks over the hinterland of Asia Minor for centuries before the Turks arrived there and even made return migrations, now and then, as far as Macedonia. No wonder some of the aura of a fable hangs about these men.

123 So strong is this aura for me that a quarter of an hour after catching a glimpse of this isolated Sarakatsán I was sitting at the table next to him, among the smithies and harness makers, on the outskirts of the town where old artisans settled down to quiet nargilehs after quitting work. I watched him order and drink a coffee, and

Greece EH1

S 123 pondered how I could get into conversation. Soon, with a clap of horny hands, he was summoning the *kafedji* and preparing to depart. The S [492] *kafedji* arrived laden with an armload of elaborate gear, and a boy followed leading a horse. The Sarakatsán mounted and laid his crook across his S lap. The *kafedji* handed him two six-foot-tall can- 123 dles, adorned with ribbons and fluttering white 585 satin bows. Then followed all the frivolous-looking white baubles which, as I know to my cost, a *koumbaros* — the groomsman, sponsor, or best man — must contribute to the crowning of a groom and his bride at an Orthodox wedding. There were smaller candles, lengths of cloth in brown paper, parcels of sweets, and finally, the box containing the tinsel wedding crowns themselves. S 123 Suddenly my luck changed; as he moved off, a muslin bag of sugared almonds slipped and fell S into the dust. I dived for it, ran after him, and, [57] my luck still holding, remembered as I handed it over to utter the ritual phrase of a wedding guest to a *koumbaros*: "*Axioi tou misthou sou!*" ("May they be worthy of your hire!") He reined in, and placing his right hand over his heart, bowed his head in a ceremonious gesture of thanks. Then, after an up-and-down glance and a pause, he asked, in a queer rustic accent, what place I was from. When I had told him, I asked him where the wedding was to be. "Tomorrow at Sikarayia," he said, "two hours from here." After another pause, he said, "Honor us by coming." He repeated his graceful bow, and bristling with his crook and his candles and aflutter with satin ribbons, clattered off.

S 122 The carriage that bore us along a narrow-gauge track next day seemed as obsolete as an equipage G in a museum. It was high and narrow, the coach- 497 work was painted to mimic the graining of yellowwood, and the upholstery was threadbare tasseled velvet. This delightful carriage, fit for two travelers out of Jules Verne, carried us swaying through the Thracian sky at an abnormal height. The gorges and forests of plane trees, the rocky riverbeds, and even the scrub-mantled mountainsides G seemed far below. Every so often we passed soli- [648] tary police posts and lookout platforms on stilts, each one a pedestal for an armed and helmeted soldier; reminders of the nearness, and of the danger, of the Bulgarian frontier. Asprawl among the trees and bracken, blown there by guerrilla mines, the rusty remains of carriages were gloomy mementos of the civil war. The country shook in the noonday.

G 497 A jovial unshaven face appeared outside the moving windows, as though its owner were flying alongside. It was the ticket collector. When he

had pocketed our tickets, we watched him work his perilous way along the duckboard of the corridorless train like a cat burglar. A large open cattle car was hitched to the rear of the train. A sound of raucous singing was carried along the line, and a blue flag whirled overhead on a long pole. The conductor, settling in our carriage for a chat on his return journey, confirmed what we had surmised. "Yes, it's a Sarakatsán bridegroom on his way to a wedding up at Sikarayia. They've been drinking for days." When we pulled up at the next wayside halt, the whole party leaped, shouting and singing, to the platform, the banner aswirl, and bore down on a small group waiting under an acacia tree. The white-clad groom and his cronies returned a few moments later, carrying the bride, who was attired in a stiff black and white costume of angular and Aztec strangeness, by her elbows. She sailed along the platform with the passivity of a sacred image being transported from shrine to shrine. As the shaft of the standard-bearer's banner careered past, I saw that it was topped by a pomegranate, and the same fertility symbol was affixed to the top and the two arms of a beribboned wooden cross. When they were all aboard, the groom's party fired their guns into the sky, and singing and intermittent firing accompanied the rest of the journey.

"*Paraxenoi anthropoi*," vouchsafed the conductor, after clicking his tongue censoriously a dozen times. "Odd people —" They did seem a contrast to the lofty Victorian stateliness of our carriage. He told us that the groom was the son of a great *tsellingas* — the head of a clan, as it were, of Sarakatsán shepherds — in fact, an *architsellingas*, called Kosta Zogas, who wintered at Sikarayia and pastured his sheep in the Rhodope Mountains in summer, not far from the flocks of the bride's father, another *architsellingas*, called Vrysas, who wintered near Souphlí, along the banks of the Hebrus. "You'd think," he went on, "when you see them in their rush hovels and their old capes, that they were poor. Not a bit of it! They've got pots of money. Literally pots. They fill up pitchers with gold sovereigns, and bury them — no one knows how many — whole fortunes in the ground."

Sikarayia turned out to be a village of beautifully thatched Sarakatsán huts. Giant beehives swelled and tapered in tiers of cropped reed which overlapped with the precision of the plating on armadilloes' backs, and all of them were topped by wooden crosses near holes in the thatch through which thin blue smoke curled. Black-clad Sara-

Sikaraya Village

585 Black-clad Saru-
katsáns crowded below the nuptial car, the bride was hoisted to earth, and in a hubbub of shouts and greetings and a rattle of musketry, the whole mob headed for the little white church. The train, letting off an answering whistle and an obbligato of steam, swayed away down the valley.

585 346 Inside the church two rows of columns sustained the white barrel vault of the basilica. A gilt iconostasis blazed, and overhead hung a great candelabrum formed by double-headed brass Byzantine eagles joining their wing tips in a ring, and from the center an ostrich egg was suspended. [223] The noise and the heat in the church were considerable, and thonged wooden flasks full of warm red wine circulated freely among the congregation.

585 301 292

585 [293] [292] [202] [142] The chanting of the priest — a fine figure in a white dalmatic and a wide blue and silver stole, with hair which uncoiled to his waist — soared heroically and effortlessly above this hubbub. All the faces were scorched, many were aquiline with blue eyes, and the hair of several nomads was bleached by the sun to a flaxen fairness. Apart from the priest, the only other grave faces were 585 292 [202] those of the bridal couple. The bride's withdrawn expression, her downcast eyes under her flowered headdress and a small blue cross which was strangely penciled or painted on her brow, never changed. The groom was dressed in a gold-embroidered red velvet waistcoat, a silk sash with the blue and white Greek colors, white jutting

585 292 [531] fustanella and tights, and, disappointingly, pointed black towny shoes. His face, rather a commonplace one for a Sarakatsán, was a mask of confused virile seriousness. In only one thing did his outfit differ from the full-dress Greek mountain costume: black woolen armlets, embroidered with specifically Sarakatsán geometric zigzags, encased his forearms below the wide white sleeves which ended at his elbow.

585 ? Despite the chaos in the church, the marriage service evolved unperturbed. The two enormous ribboned candles were held by minute shepherd boys, like the lances of heraldic supporters, on either side of a little altar in the body of the nave. The *koumbaros* switched the flimsy white flower crowns from head to head in a succession of intricate passes and arranged and rearranged their hands and bound them with ribbon and performed yet more complex manipulations with the ring, and followed them in kissing the bossy silver binding of the proffered missal. Finally he accompanied them, hand in hand, led by the priest under a fusillade of flung rice and sweets, in a slow and dignified dance thrice around the altar. This is a kind of hieratic pavane, which more than any other moment in the solemnization (for the wine that the priest offers to the bridal couple is no more than a commemoration of the wedding at Cana of Galilee) hallows and confirms the sacrament.

Out in the sunlight, all was levity, flourished banners, and gunfire again. We made our way through the wigwams to the house which the groom's father, striking modern roots in his winter pastures, had recently built. As the newly wed couple reached the threshold, someone handed the groom a sieve, which he threw over his shoulder, a measure which is said to forfend marital discord. They both kissed the hand of the groom's father and laid it to their foreheads for a second and [123] vanished indoors. My new friend of yesterday, [576] Barba Petro, introduced us to this pastoral dynast, who welcomed us with the same graceful inclination, with his hand laid on his breast, and led us in.

[352] There were already plenty of guests there, both on the low divan which ran around the room and cross-legged on the mats which padded the floor; [539] and at each new arrival, while black-swathed aunts and grandmothers offered the newcomers saucers with a spoonful of jam, a glass of water, and a thimbleful of raki, they intoned a welcoming song: "Mother, our friends have come," they sang, "our bidden guests. Bid them welcome with [516] honey and sugar and with golden words." Some sat with hands linked around their doubled-up

knees, others leaned back against the wall or the divan with a knee cocked up to support an outstretched arm, their fingers allowing the amber beads of a *kombolói* to fall at intervals of a few seconds. All were luxuriously asprawl and akimbo, and the company bristled with shepherd's crooks. They were laid across their laps or tilted at a slope over their shoulders. Some of the shepherds' crooks, stafis grasped by gnarled fists, stood bolt upright; others were propped against the wall; the top of each well-worn shaft was joined to a twirling hook carved in the shape of a dolphin, a dragon, a ram's head, or a snake.

Only a couple of the guests were dressed in black kilts. The others wore rough and hairy black jodhpurs. A few of the wildest and shaggiest were shod in rawhide moccasins tilting up like canoes, worn over swaths of white wool bound about their ankles with broad thongs. All of them wore their soft black skullcaps rakishly askew. Except for the white and pleated bridegroom, who stood by the door receiving horny handshakes and whiskery embraces from the guests, nearly all the people in the room were middle-aged or stricken in years. They conversed at the top of their voices; used to shouting against the wind to each other from hilltop to hilltop, they find it hard to modulate their voices at close quarters, so the smallest talk is stentorian, and the only alternative is a collusive and almost inaudible whisper, to which they suddenly resort if they notice a look of suffering on their interlocutor's face.

THEIR thick rural tones sounded different from those of Thrace. They resembled, rather, the dialect of Roumeli and of parts of Epirus, much further west; an accent which consists of suppressing all final vowels and most of those in the middle of words as well, giving their speech an oddly chopped and consonantal ring. It was made harder to follow by a private vocabulary for the details of their calling. Different kinds of springs, qualities of grass, ways of hut building and bell tuning, breeds of sheep and goats and horses and watchdogs all have special names. They have their own expressions for the tupping, lambing, weaning, shearing, carding, spinning, milking, seething, scalding, path finding, tent pitching, camp striking, trough scooping, and weather divining around which their whole life turns. How should a layman know that the reddish- or dark-faced sheep are called *Katsoúla*, or that belling them is called "ironing" or "arming" them? Or how many *okes* of bronze, and of what pitch, should be slung around the neck of a bellwether? Or that the best time to arm the flocks

192 233 is at the Feast of the Annunciation, "when the first cuckoo is heard"? Such were the topics that boomed about the room.

233 221 103 [494] Barba Petro pointed out the celebrities: "Uncle George over there, with only one eye — he's one of the biggest *tsellingas* in the Rhodope. Over ten thousand sheep and goats he's got, and I expect this is the first time he's been inside a house. The one talking to him is ninety-three, and he used to pasture his flocks near Saranta Ekklesies, or Forty Churches — Kirk Kilisse, the Turks call it — away, away beyond Adrianople. Then, after the [648] Balkan Wars, the Turks closed the frontier, so now he builds his winter huts along the coast, west of here, below Xanthi. The other one, with a scar on his forehead, used to winter between Haskovo and Stara Zagora — wonderful grass! — but now, what with the Bulgars, the horn wearers, he's had to look elsewhere. I had a few, but good ones. I used to graze them not far from Kios, in Bithynia, near Nicaea, on the Asian coast. That was years ago. Caïques sailing past in the Sea of Marmara could hear my bells. But the Rhodope is where we all belong."

101 I asked him what the name "Sarakatsán" meant, saying that I had heard it was really *Karakatchani*, a Turkish word meaning "the black ones who depart" or "the black departers." He shut his eyes and flung back his head, clicking his tongue in the negative. "No, no. That's not right. [173] We don't know, but some people say we get our name from the village of Syrako, in Epirus, and that Aly Pasha burned the place down and drove us away and left us wandering ever since." I said 101 Syrako was a Koutzovlach village. Uncle Petro 186 testily stabbed the butt of his crook into the mat several times. "I don't know anything about that. *We are Greeks*. Nothing to do with the Koutzovlachs. Who knows where they come from? You can't understand them when they are talking among themselves. People are always getting us mixed up, because we both wear black and graze [582] flocks. We keep clear of them. You'll never get a Sarakatsán marrying a Koutzovlach. Let alone a Karagouni. *Po, po, po!*" At the mention of these other tribes, he caught the hem of his jacket between finger and thumb in a Panhellenic gesture of squeamish disdain, and shook it lightly to and fro as though to rid it of dust and vermin.

585 262 The reiterated song of welcome, after gradually swelling in volume as the room filled with guests, had stopped long ago. Low circular tables, laid [252] with glasses and with communal dishes of roasted [263] steaming lamb, skillfully hacked from the carcasses turning outside and sprinkled with rock salt, were

585 262 [273] being moved in and wedged among the company as tightly as jigsaw pieces. Wicker-bound demijohns of wine were beginning to travel from hand to hand overhead. Glasses clashed convivially together, miraculously filling up as soon as they were drained, and plates were returning again and again for second or third helpings. Outside the window, swarms of guests were feasting under the trees. Whole lambs were being flourished, sizzling and smoking on their spits, and we could hear the crash of cleaver on block and the crunch of hewn bones as a sinewy nomad toiled like a headsman to keep pace with two hundred magnificent appetites. [252] Nothing accompanied this delicious roast except cross sections of dark and excellent bread sliced from loaves like small millstones and hot from the domed ovens outside. [609] It was, in a way, a Stone Age banquet. Strangers, on occasions like these, are the objects of eager solicitude: special morsels, forkfuls of liver or kidney and even more recondite appendages, are constantly being proffered, and helpings of brain are delved from heads which have been bisected lengthwise and opened like a casket, each half, sometimes, still equipped with a twisting horn. Avoidance of the sheep's eyes is a recurrent problem for outsiders. They are highly prized by mountaineers, but for all but the most assimilated travelers, the message they signal from the prongs is one of harrowing reproach.

585 533 After an hour or so the general hum of talk sank to a single deep bourdon note which resolved itself into the opening phrases of a Klephtic song, the first stanza being sung by a group of two or three, and then repeated in a slow and long-drawn roar, starting with the vehemence of a lurch, by the rest of the shepherds. Rather surprisingly, so far from the Peloponnesus, it was about the great War of Independence leader, Kolokotrones. (I would have expected some more northern Klepht, and above all, Katsandónis, a Sarakatsán from the wild Agrapha Mountains.) [539] "Kolokotrones shouted," sang the nomads' voices, "and all the world trembled: 'Where are you, poor Nikitara, you whose feet are winged? Go, go and seize the Turks, drive them like hares into a trap, slay some and capture some, and lock some up in the castle. . . . At Antikórpha and Trikorpha the blood is flowing like a brook.'" This gave rise to another deep melopoeia from the south: "They have blocked all the roads of the Morea, they have sealed up all the passes." When the massed voices died down, the steady and unchanging note of the smaller group continued in a wail, setting up its own curious vibration. This comparative lull was always followed by the long deep cry of conjuration, "*Orá!*" ("Oh, you!" or "Hark!"), which ushers in most Klephtic stanzas, and another act from the

585 533 warlike past began, heckled and abetted by sudden ejaculations and shrill shepherds' whistles.

585 539 These Sarakatsáns were not great virtuosos, but they had the merit of vigor and conviction. I was struck by one of their songs in which the last word, *Makarondes* — a derogatory epithet for the Italians — had obviously, judging by the style of the words and the tune, replaced the name of some much older foe in order to fit the winter campaign of 1941: "Would that I had wings to soar on high, up to the topmost peaks of the mountains, to alight there and gaze down, down over Epirus and over poor Chimarra, to look down on the war, where the Greeks are fighting the *Makarondes*." The modern ending was a bit of an anticlimax, especially after the mention of Chimarra, that warlike Greek stronghold in the Acroceraunian Mountains over the Albanian border, which is almost as celebrated for its martial stubbornness, in Turkish times, as Souli and the Sphakian Mountains of Crete. There was a distinct trace of anticlimax too, but also of oddity, about another of their songs: "Anyone who wants to go to America, let him sit down and ponder. Forty days at sea, days of sorrow and sighing. They get into a boat and go ashore in New York. They know nobody there, so back they wing like birds." A sad little tale, but most peculiar here because, although in most Greek gatherings of this size at least a half dozen would have spent a few years in Brooklyn or Chicago or Nebraska, Uncle Petro assured me that no one in the room had ever been to America, nor, as far as he knew, any Sarakatsán ever, and ideas of its whereabouts and character, for those who had heard its name, would be as hazy as a layman's notions of life on Mars.

575 DURING the banquet and the long procession of refilled glasses and the concatenation of songs, the falling shafts of sunlight from the windows had slanted horizontally and veered askew down the room; the long sunlit parallelograms on the opposite wall were turning an evening apricot hue. During these cheerful hours there had been no glimpse of the bride. "She's upstairs," Uncle Petro said, "we must go and look at her," and grasping the shaft of his upright crook like a punt pole, with joints momentarily screak after a long session, he levered himself to his feet. "*Ta Gerámata!*" he said, with a smile, "old age." He led the way up the ladder staircase, and the clamor dwindled.

585 583 Dead silence reigned in the upper chamber. The dowry was arranged along the two side walls: rolled bales of dark homespun for capes and for the bivouacs which are pitched on the march;

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S 585 a few of them white, some gray or a dark russet, but most of them black — the colors, indeed, of S 583 the flocks from which they had been shorn — and S many of them of a matted and shaggy texture, like [513] rolled-up smoke. Scratchy blankets with angular patterns were piled in tall heaps, and pillows that S looked as hard as granite, and the bride's black 585 and white trousseau. In the center of the end wall, with bowed head and lowered eyelids and with her brown hands crossed over her midriff, the bride stood motionless. On either side of her on the floor sat her retinue of wild but subdued-looking girls. At our conventional wishes, "*Kalorizikis!*" S [576] ("May the marriage be well rooted!"), she inclined her head a few inches but uttered never a syllable. Nor, beyond a stiff bow, did she or her lips move a fraction when other latecomers arrived and hobnobbed with Uncle Petro and us as indifferently as if the figures at the other end of the room were effigies in an ethnological mu- S seum. Their extraordinary out- [292] fits, nearly identical except for the flowers and the gold coins that adorned the bride, were unlike anything I had seen before.

G 292 In those Greek villages where the women wear their regional costumes on feast days and for ceremonies — and there are still a large, though diminishing, number — and in some out-of-the-way spots where a simpler working version of this gala rig is worn on weekdays as well, one is astonished by the richness and variety and grace: by voluminous skirts, expanding from tight waists, of Damascus brocade or Broussa velvet; by the soft and tilted mulberry-colored fezzes with long satin tassels, or gold-embroidered velvet pillboxes, or intricately arranged silk kerchiefs; even, in one part of Macedonia, by a headdress topped by a semicircular plume, like the helmet of Pallas Athene. There are satin-covered buttons, chased silver clasps, and oriental filigree from Yanina, and over the velvet boleros and the tight sleeves — or sleeves which may hang slashed and loose from the elbow like the petals of tulips — rivers of gold braid uncoil and ramify in flowing, oriental, baroque, and rococo flourishes as richly and elaborately G as over an archbishop's cope. In the wilder moun- [184] tains the costumes are stiffer and rougher, but the basic canon is a dazzling variety of color and material and a style that is fluid, feminine, and ooo deeply romantic. The visions summoned up by

[p. 79-A]
[text continues on p. 79-C]

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[p.79-B]

600 Byron's Haidée and the Maid of Athens are, in fact, pretty near the mark.

585 292 [298] [531] All was different here. Not only was there no silk, satin, velvet, or gold braid from the West and the Levant, but hardly a stitch which came from anywhere but the backs of their flocks and their prehistoric-looking looms, and complex though the costume was, there was not a single foliating curve or circle or ellipse, nothing swaying [301] or branching or interweaving or flowering. The only rounded things were the chains of necklaces, the gold Napoleons, Turkish sequins, and gold talers that hung around the bride's neck. Another latter-day curvilinear afterthought to the angular whole, and one which was common to both the bride and her retinue, was a wide white goffered or crocheted circular collar like a flattened, hidalgo's ruff, ending at the shoulder in scallops. The complex headdress of flowers and stiff muslin and the veil which hung down the bride's back had the extraneous and charming air of votive adornments attached to a processional statue on a Calabrian or Andalusian feast day. From a rosette over each of her ears a long cluster of ribbons hung; they framed her face like the pendants on the diadem of the Empress Theodora at Ravenna.

But, apart from these festival trimmings, all was made up of stern black and white lines and angles, and so broad and solid seeming were the black white-banded pleats that if any of the girls made a movement, her heavy and unwieldy clothes moved as unpliantly as armor. The aprons, which reached their knees, were as stiff as stoles or heralds' tabards, their tunics were as rigid as dalmatics, and nothing bore any relationship to conventional ideas of the human shape. The costumes were related to the curvature and the jointing of the human body as arbitrarily as are the plates of a metal fish to its prototype, the sections of a toy wooden snake, or the laminations of a samurai's armor. [301] [531] Their forearms and legs were encased in geometrically patterned armlets and greaves, and the bride's wrists were aclank with heavy bracelets, and all, strangely and touchingly, were shod in stout flat-heeled walking shoes. (Their mothers would have worn pomponned *tsarouchia*.) It was hard to determine, therefore, why these [531] clothes appeared so beautiful. They exerted, it finally dawned on us, the peculiar captivation of

585 ancient Greek vases of the geometric period, for
292 every design was made up of straight lines and
531 triangles, with here and there an inchoate beginning of those patterns of white crosses on a black ground, and black on white, that cover the vestments of frescoed prelates on the wall of a narthex. All was angular: triangles mounting in pyramids or shooting diagonally in zigzags and sawteeth and staircases with, very seldom, here and there, a small and subtly placed triangle or chevron, among the dominating black and white, of pale ocher, or terra-cotta, or a deadened blue. "Geometric" and "neolithic" were the epithets which began to float to the surface of the mind, bringing with them the excitement of the thought that these clothes and these designs might not have changed for three thousand years or more. One knows that these thoughts must be suppressed until they can be confirmed by research. But such dalliance is always stimulating. It was backed here by the certainty that nothing like these clothes exists in Greece or in the Balkan Peninsula or in Europe.

149 The bride's face, with the blue cross on her fore-
[302] head under black hair as coarse and lustrous as a stallion's tail and the stiff linen coif with its load of baubles and flowers, was burned a deep bronze. It had the metallic, wide-browed, heavy-lidded beauty, the slightly sad mouth, the clear line of jaw from chin to ear, and, springing from its flattened ruff and its stomacher of coins, the strong columnar neck which I admired so much, a few years ago, among the Mayas of the Honduranean and Guatemaltecan jungles. Obsidian, chalcedony, and basalt would have been the stones in which to carve those features and that still and melancholy posture. It is a type of looks which has an arresting distinction, a Gauguin-limbed strength at variance with the slender Tanagra delicacy that seems to have left an indelible stamp on Western ideas of grace and style.

585 THERE was no time for more of these cogitations.
[534] The deep reedy blast of a clarinet sounded under the window; then, after a few twiddles, a violin and the twanging of a lute and a tentative fluttering tinkle of hammers over the wires of a zither. "Ah, the instruments," Uncle Petro said, "at last!"
[533] I asked Petro if the musicians were Sarakatsáns.
[648] He looked at me in surprise. "Sarakatsáns? We only play the flute. They are Gypsies." And so they were, very dark ones, lined up outside under a tree in blue suits, wearing pointed black shoes and ties, the only ties for miles, and looking sleek and urban among these other nomads. There was a crunch of hobnails up the stairs as the

585 groom, flanked by his comrades, came to claim the bride and lead the first dance. She was reft from her shadows, conducted downstairs and out under the trees as the sun set at the end of the valley.

585 535 Her husband conducted her through an extremely formal *syrtos*, followed by a *kalamatiano*, each taking alternate places at the head of a dozen guests strung out, with linked hands, in a crescent. Neither looked at the other, and there was a distinct hint of constraint in the air — no wonder, since, though they came from neighboring summer pastures, it was quite likely they had never [584] met before. Their marriage was as free of private choice as a medieval dynastic alliance between a Wittelsbach and a Hohenstaufen.

585 It is hard not to wonder about the early phases of primitive marriages all over Greece; the shuddering apprehension which must prevail on the one hand and the unmanning strangeness on the other. Till very recently, in the Mani, so inhibiting was the shyness of newly wed strangers that a sword was placed under their pillow in the hopes that it might symbolically sunder this knot of 585 constraint in one Gordian slash. These handicaps 831 must have been made all the more debilitating, in former times, by gloomy preoccupations with the previous inviolacy of the bride, and the long vigil of the guests outside the nuptial dwelling till the groom's mother could blazon forth the all-clear in red on white — to an outburst of salvos and of rustic epithalamiums — on a gory sheet or a shift. In these strict and moral societies, such proofs were surely redundant; but I have heard of Cretan bridegrooms — convinced, and probably baselessly, that others have been beforehand with them — repudiating their brides and unloosing, as though in compensation, unstanchable bloodshed between families. And what about the poor bridegroom? Would the flood tide of wine swirl him triumphantly through all obstacles, or unmast him amidships? No wonder they looked shy. [602] Young Sarakatsáns now do their military service like the rest of Greeks and no doubt head for the lanes on the outskirts of garrison towns on mating [836] forays with their fellow recruits. But formerly, living in a ferociously chaste society, they approached wedlock unarmed by all but theory, hearsay, and rule of thumb.

585 535 Her two dances over, the bride withdrew to her chamber, and more general dancing began. It was uncomplicated, formal, and correct. Plenty of the younger Sarakatsáns were well on in wine and had been so for days, but their dash and high spirits deserted them the moment they joined the

585 long chain of the dancers. Their pace subsided
535 to a ritual shuffle. There is nothing unusual in this; with a few exceptions, Greek dances, however many people may be joined hand in hand, are in effect solos — everything devolves on the leader, and each dancer, when his turn comes, fulfills the temporary role of coryphaeus. The job of the others, and especially of his immediate neighbor, to whom he is linked by a handkerchief, is to support him in his convolutions, and these are astonishing when a real mountain dasher is in the lead. But today, even after the first bridal saraband, the Dionysiac zest seemed to abandon the others when they linked hands. The dominance of form in the life of these nomads began to dawn on us.

585 Outside this semicircle, however, all was rejoicing. Staidness evaporated on release, and scores of young nomads were carousing and reeling under
[535] the branches. Squatting or standing among the wigwams, rings of geometrical women confabulated or sang together, and there was even an ex-
[283] clusive little ellipse of dancing women. Their gatherings were abristle — like those of the men with their crooks — with the carved distaffs tucked in their belts, all cloudy with rough hanks of raw wool, the spindles rising and falling at the end
[284] of their twirling threads. Some of the younger of these spinning squaws had wooden cradles slung papooselike on their backs, each containing
[533] a miniature nomad. Their songs had the same epic themes, laced with lament, as those of the men. The murmur of their talk was broken, again and again, with peals of laughter.

The Sarakatsánissas, usually so silent in the

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585 The Sarakatsánissas, usually so silent in the
521 presence of men, look forward to weddings as
831 their only chances of fun. The talk takes a turn
[562] of hair-raising bawdiness. None of the exciting,
comic, or absurd aspects of sex are left unex-
ploited. Rhymes, anecdotes, and reminiscences
are eagerly repeated and capped, crone mumbles
toothlessly to crone, bantering wives make humor-
ously boastful and teasing comparisons about their
married lives, girls listen wide-eyed and agog.
[152] Fits of laughter punctuate this scandalous chat,
hands are flung in the air in hilarity, faces are
covered in mock shame. All this goes on out of
male earshot, while at a distance their husbands
and fathers and descendants smile indulgently
at this seasonable ribaldry.

585 NIGHTFALL had transformed the scene indoors.
123 Late arrivals and a few indefatigable ones were
[354] still at meat; but the rest, lit now by scattered oil
dips, had lapsed into a semitrance of wine and
song. Our return with Uncle Petro evoked hos-
pitable cries of greeting and invitation, repeated
many times and driven home by a clashing of wine
tumblers, to stay the night, as it was so late; or for
a week, a month, or a year, or forever, to forget
London and take to the huts. Alas, some tiresome
fixture in Alexandroupolis next morning com-
pelled us to leave, so, after manifold farewells, we
climbed the stairs to pay our respects to the bride
in her hushed upper chamber.

The rushlight on a stool cast so dim a light that the group at the end was hard to discern. One of the seated bridesmaids, mown down by her vigil, was fast asleep where she sat; a nudge from her neighbor shook her blinking into line. None of the other tiring women had moved, and the bride had remained frozen for the hours since we had last seen her in the same posture of sub-mission. The faint radiance seemed to have robbed them all of a dimension. Darkly haloed by their own interlocking shadows, they merged with the wall, their black and white figures assum-ing the aspect of a half-lit fresco, with here and there an earring, a coin, a bracelet, a ring, or a necklace glittering momentarily and dimming again, as the wick rose or fell, like fragments of gilt or isolated gold tesserae in a mosaic. The bride silently bowed in answer to our farewells, miracu-lously moving among her still hagiographic troop of virgins and martyrs. We tiptoed out.

"Doesn't she ever speak?" I asked Uncle Petro when we were out of doors.

"Not now," he said.

"It's rather sad, during her own wedding."

"Ah! That's the way it is. That's how it should be."

[p. 81-B]

585 By the light of the fires among the huts, the scene out of doors was assuming a Brueghelish aspect. The dancers were still sedately moving in silhouette, a last spitted lamb was turning over a bed of glowing charcoal, and groups of nomads were staggering about arm in arm, filling the night with cries and laughter. Overcome by wine or exhaustion, a few of them lay fast asleep under the branches in disjointed attitudes, as though snipers had laid them low in mid-career. A heroic but unsteady figure, egged on by his companions, was draining, with head and trunk flung back, the last dregs from an immense wicker-cradled demijohn. Empty, it fell to the ground with a thud and rolled away amid cheers. A flaxen-haired boy, bent double against a tree trunk, vomited the day's intake in a somber gush. Chewing and snarling sheep dogs wrangled over bones.
[354] The huts, vague globes looming out of the night, were now softly lit from within by the glimmer of oil dips and hearths. Deeper still in the darkness, one divined the presence of tethered horses. The singing grew fainter as we reached the railway line.

585 178 "You should have seen the weddings when I was a boy," Barba Petro was saying, as the serpent of lighted train windows grew larger down the valley. "We used to set out on horseback a hundred strong to carry off the bride, firing off our guns as fast as we could load them. *Dang! Dang! Boom! Boom! Dang!* Horses used to be lamed, people wounded, sometimes people actually got killed. Whereas now —"

123 The train had clanked to a standstill beside us. We were aloft once more among the anachronistic fringes and tassels of our Victorian carriage.

"Come to see us up in the mountains, up in the Rhodope!" he shouted as the train began to move. "The plains are no good." He pointed with his crook into the night. "Up in the Rhodope —"

The wheels drowned the rest. The light from the carriage windows flashed down across his dwindling figure at quicker intervals, and the glimmering huts and the fires and the tiny moving silhouettes behind him looked as strange now and as alien to Europe as a nomadic encampment in the steppes of central Asia.

114 WHAT I could not know about these extraordinary people at the time of my visit to Sikarayia, I learned two years ago, when Mrs. Angelica Hadjimichalis' two quarto volumes, *I Sarakatsáni*, appeared. A long lifetime of devotion and study, a great knowledge of the Greek past and Greek art history, and many decades of research and fieldwork among the Sarakatsáns themselves have been

lavished on these books. A third volume is in preparation — the great task, alas, has been delayed by ill health — which promises to be the most interesting of the three.

The author is now advanced in years, and the bulk of her exploration, perforce, was undertaken some time ago, and many of the nomads among whom her researches began were chosen on account of their age and their long memories. Since then, the agents of detribalization, of which the author writes so sadly, have been hard at work. The last quarter of a century has probably done more than the last three thousand years to change the traditional life of the Sarakatsáns. It is amazing that so many clans have remained intact. Yet even among these, which are fortunately still the majority by far, the last few decades have taken toll of many ancient ways. The life described, then, in *I Sarakatsáni* is truer of forty years ago, when the nomads still had no documents or *état civil*, and when schools, state religion, taxes, and military service were unknown to them, than of today. It is a record of their life before the virus of disintegration attacked them, and a fascinating and curious picture it presents.

The pre-Christian legacy, all over Greece, is never far from the surface. Among the Sarakatsáns pagan magic survives in a yet more pronounced shape, and the superstructure of Christian form, owing to the remoteness of the nomads from the normal sources of doctrine and practice, is correspondingly more shaky.

Traditionally, in Sarakatsán dogma there is no awareness of the existence of the Trinity: God the Father and Jesus are considered the same Person, and He is known as *Aï*, which is a dialect abbreviation of *ayios* (*hagios*), the word for "saint" or "holy one." Sometimes He is known as *Proto Aï*, or "First among the Saints," and sometimes as *Aphenti*, "the Lord," from the ancient Greek word *authentes*. All over Greece, the army of saints has taken the place of the ancient polytheistic pantheon. This is especially true among the nomads; *Aï's* status is only a little higher than that of the first among His peers, and, as one would expect in a severely masculine and patriarchal society, male saints have cornered the high places in this celestial company. But their numbers have been drastically reduced: only a handful, from the thousands of Orthodox saints who overlap and crowd each other in the villagers' calendars and the synaxary, have found their way into the wigwams.

All the usual Panhellenic spirits — Pagan or Airy Ones, Exotics, Shadowy Ones, vampires, werewolves, dragons, ghosts, and the Kallikantzaros centaur — people the Sarakatsán cosmogony and infest the folds. They can be exorcised by counterspells and baffled by phylacteries of dogs'

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droppings; and a dried snake's head, hidden in a church for forty days and then retrieved, is sovereign against many baleful manifestations. To the Nereids, a danger for all lonely shepherds near pools and streams, young Sarakatsáns are particularly exposed. They are often struck dumb and robbed of their wits by chancing on the Nereid revels and dances, just as mortals were sometimes turned into trees if they had the bad luck to blunder on the dances of the nymphs. There have been many mixed nomad-Nereid marriages, and many a healthy Sarakatsán baby has been stolen from its hanging cradle and replaced by the sickly changeling of one of these water maidens.

Demons of every kind and gender dog the nomads' footsteps up hill and down dale and "chase them into woods." They are the special target of some female supernatural beings called the *Kalotyches* ("the good fortunes") — like the name *Eumenides* ("the kindly ones") for the Furies, a wry, placating misnomer — who are half women, half she-asses, and snake-locked, like Medusa. They plague the flocks and bring bad luck at lambing time and childbed, and they are especially to be feared during the forty days following the birth of a nomad baby.

By far the darkest villain in Sarakatsán demonology is a male spirit known as the *Daouti*. *Daoutis*, sometimes called Pans, are the wildest, strongest, and wickedest of them all. Shaped like satyrs, with half-goat, half-human bodies and long legs with cleft hooves, they have the heads of rams with large twirling horns. Along with certain other demons, *Daoutis* are most dangerous to flocks at three seasons of the year: during Advent, just before lambing; in late April or early May, as the shepherds prepare to leave their winter quarters for the mountains; and from the feast of the Transfiguration until the end of August. They are prone, during these bad periods, to swoop, shrieking like birds of prey, on the cowering flocks, and after two or three of these onslaughts, the beasts begin to perish, sometimes a dozen at a time; they swell up and die. Sliced tortoise meat is used as a counterspell, and the shepherds shift camp at once. If they can find a priest, he sprinkles the new site with holy water, and the sheep's bells are taken off and blessed. Unlike most wicked spirits, *Daoutis* do not flinch from attacking in broad daylight, and possessing the knack of making friends with the dogs, they pad along after the flocks unmolested. Therefore, when an emergency fold is built, the dogs are left behind and fires are lit to make a magic circle of smoke. *Daoutis* also pick up the Christian names of mortals; so the shepherds, if they hear anyone calling them, hold their tongues — answering might rob them of the power of speech for good. These terrible spirits

spread sudden panics, and when they are not actively engaged in evildoing, they skulk out of sight but within earshot and play their flutes.

Good and evil omens, as of old, are discerned in the flight of birds. The nomads abhor eagles and vultures and all birds of prey that hover on high: they belong to the devil, and are thus in league with the evil spirits. When these harbingers of peril hang in midair above a caravan, they are spying on the destination. The nomads' abomination of these birds may also spring from the occasional raids of eagles, when newborn kids are carried away bleating piteously into the sky. The nomads prophesy from entrails, and like most ancient and modern Greeks, they read the future in the markings on sheep's shoulder blades. Their sacrifices, *kourbania*, are frequent. A *Pitta*, a kind of cake which is baked in a wide metal pan, is the rather gloomy fare at most of their feasts, as they consider it wrong to kill and eat an animal without some ritual excuse. So, as the only meat they get is that when a beast is slaughtered for a sacrificial occasion, they pine for these pretexts, even when the cause is a distressing one. A wedding or the christening of a *tsellingas*' son, the illness of one of their community, an epidemic among the flocks, the birth of a seven-month child, the arrival of an honored guest, or the end of shearing — all these are occasions for meat. The sacrificial beast is always roasted whole on a spit, and its throat is cut as it lies on a flat branch with its eyes looking into the sun. The act is surrounded by much mystery, and the nomads peer at the insides for mantic significance; and at Easter, a bloody cross from the paschal lamb is dabbed on the shoulders of children.

The approach to Lent, and especially the Saturday night and the early hours of the Sunday before Lent, used to be the signal for much behavior which was not found elsewhere. The wearing of masks, the painting of faces, the donning of whiskers and beards of goat's hair, and the young men dressing up as women — all this, with copious drinking, horseplay, and cheerful frisking about among the wigwams, is pretty current practice still, a token of rustic carnival zest. But formerly it took a much more stylized form. A heavily painted young man clad in a scarlet dress and long goatskin locks was chosen as a bride, and a whiskered and skin-clad comrade represented the groom; others were rigged out as the priest, the *koumbaros*, and the wedding guests. A mock Christian marriage was then irreverently solemnized, followed by dances which were far more uninhibited than are those at a real marriage. The bridal

536 pair then retired to a hut, and to the hilarity of all,
522 comic simulacra of considerable indecency were
831 enacted within. But the groom was found wanting and thrown out; candidate after candidate entered with apparent promise, and each one in turn was
[533] ejected in disgrace. A fitting champion was discovered at last, and during a final mime of triumphant bawdiness, the entire company danced around the hut singing "The Pepper Song," the dancers alternately banging their noses and their rumps on the ground with a seesaw motion I would give much to observe.

851 THE feast of St. George is the most propitious
553 for christenings, and babies born immediately
[794] afterward often have to wait for a year to be bap-
[775] tized. But they are always named at once, and should they fall ill, they are given a lay baptism on the spot, lest they should die and turn into little
163 vampires. The average family varies between
848 five and fifteen children. Random fornication,
[684] adultery, divorce, rape, and bastardy are unknown, and should a case of bastardy ever crop up, death to all concerned is the only remedy. This is not only for reasons of morality, for these ill-starred children are thought to be Satan per-
[725] sonified; they bring a curse on the huts, and should one grow up and die a natural death, a ghost rises

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from the grave and haunts the folds and blights the pastures.

A recent unpublished source casts new light on the obscure drama of nomad marriages. I have mentioned in reference to the Mani the sword which, by sympathetic magic, is said to cleave asunder the bonds of fear and shyness between the two married strangers when they are finally alone together. In Sarakatsán embraces, a blade plays a still more immediate role. Alone in the hut, lying on cut branches padded with blankets — for there is never a bridal bed or a sheet and only the strictest minimum of undressing — the groom, with a sudden masterful swoop, leaps athwart the bride, seizes her by the scruff of her neck, and with bared teeth and burning eyes, lays the edge of a dagger at her throat. Most strangely, this time-honored stratagem works; timidity boils up into hot blood on either side, confusion is ripped to shreds, the dagger is flung away, and the union is driven home and fiercely clinched in a lightning tussle.

The nomad approach to all feminine physiological troubles is primitive, deep, and dark. They never undress — all exposure is anathema to them — and there is some truth in the village rumors that they never wash. Oddly, they scarcely smell at all, perhaps because of the time-stiffened carapace of clothing which encases them. The author of the unpublished material I have already mentioned was present at the death of an old Sarakatsánissa. There was no undoing the thick geometric livery in which she was cocooned, so it was torn open with a knife, sending the bystanders reeling back like the people depicted on icons at the Raising of Lazarus. When she marries, a girl is no longer a member of her own family, and sometimes she never sees it again; she is a slave to her husband and his womenfolk, a stranger in strangers' tents. It was the rule in the stern old days that no wife should address her husband in the first years of her marriage; he, in his turn, would never call her by name; and many years and many births had to pass before they would converse in public.

Charon, Death, is a permanent presence and the most natural of companions. A nomad who perishes in the mountains goes unhouseled and unaneled. If he should die on the road — and the nomads' two yearly migrations, geared to the slow gait of the flocks, may take twenty-five or thirty days — he is laid across a pack beast, and after the body is unloaded, a candle is lit for him three evenings running and a cup of wine placed "for his soul to drink from." If a *tsellingas* falls mortally ill, the bells are muffled; and if he dies, all the animals, even the bellwethers, are disarmed in mourning. When men turn fifty and women thirty, all the nomads, however hale they are,

764 travel with their *nekrallaxia*, or death change — a
[761] new suit of clothes to be buried in. A body is laid, clad in this new attire, pointing away from the sun on the floor of his hut or his tent, with his hands and feet bound together. Kinsmen watch over the dead all night, lest a dog, a cat, or a hen should walk over him. Finally the body is wrapped in a woolen blanket or two goat's-hair cloaks and then borne away to burial on a bier of branches. As he is carried out, somebody breaks a wooden spoon, and no one looks back, for fear of Charon, who lurks behind them in search of fresh prey.

In the old days, they buried the body without a priest — "he died unchanted," the phrase goes. Before the earth covers the body, his hands and feet are unbound and his clothes are torn, so that he may move more freely "to where he is going." If a shrine were handy, there they would lay him; but a shepherd who died in the mountains was buried below a rock or on the top of a slope, whence he could look down on his flocks, should they return another year. His crook was planted nearby, and a woman's grave was marked by her
[301] distaff with its spindle and thread. She was buried with all her rings and chains and earrings
765 and her festival array of gold coins. When her
[771] relations went to dig her up again, after three, five, or seven years, to translate the bones in a box or a bag (as they do all over Greece), these trinkets were retrieved and washed and handed
[775] on to the children. Occasionally the bones of the skeleton are found to be rigid, "not to be cut"; this means that the deceased has turned into a vam-
[789] pire. It calls for priestly intervention and exorcism, and the body is left for another year to loosen up. Mourning for a dead son lasted for five years, and to emphasize this sad period, women would sometimes wear their clothes back to front. The two traditional hours of the day for the renewal of lamentation are sunset and the dim hour before daybreak, when the first crows begin to caw.

000 All this is a far cry from Daphnis and Chloë, a long, long way from Theocritus and Moschus and Bion. The shepherds of Vergil are further off still, early milestones on a flowery path that meanders through Herrick and Watteau and Fragonard to the Petit Trianon and Sèvres. The attributes of the Good Shepherd in the New Testament are as irrelevant as the virtuous and rather simple image that the shepherd's calling conjures up in the West.

181 Shepherds who never leave the plains have little interest. But those of the mountains are active, lean, spare, hawk-eyed men, with features that strike one as having been scooped out and chiseled

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181 by sun, wind, rain, snow, and hail. They give more than an impression, during their occasional descents to the lowlands, of their enemies the wolves, and, still more, of eagles. They live beyond the reach of the authorities, and the division between pastoral life and lawlessness is often vague. They spell, in fact, independence and inviolacy. Wherever they are to be found in the Greek peninsula, these mountaineers represent exemption; and the most unhampered and nonconformist of all, except for their private and tribal strait-jackets of untransgressable behavior, are the Sarakatsáns. They belong to an older and shaggier scene than the Arcadian dream and Greek Sicily. They predate and survive both the idyll and the eclogue.

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114 I first caught a glimpse of them in December,
[101] when I was nineteen, on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria between Varna and Burgas, and I saw them again in early spring four months later near
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[669] the Struma River in Macedonia, during the Venizelist revolution of 1935, after the battle at the bridge of Orliàko.

For reasons I will not describe here, I found myself trotting eastward through the late March afternoon along the road to Serres and Drama, on a borrowed horse with a friendly squadron of light cavalry in the victorious army of General Kondylis. We were slightly in advance of the main royalist army, which, with its cannon and infantry and trucks and wagons and baggage train, snaked away behind us in a long loop of dust. The march had turned into something of a carnival. After the musketry fire from both banks of the river and shelling from the hills behind and a minimum of casualties on either side, resistance had caved in and our opponents were surrendering or dispersing eastward. The day had culminated, for my new friends and for me, in the moment when they had actually drawn their sabers and galloped thunderously and bloodlessly across the wooden bridge of Orliàko against an already vanished enemy, in the nearest any of us would ever get to a cavalry charge. Buoyed up along the road by exhilaration and relief, my companions were singing music-hall songs from Athens. Unslinging their
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[361] carbines, they took potshots from the saddle at the birds on the telegraph lines. Suddenly, beyond the heads of all these cheerful horsemen, on a high wooded ridge about three miles away, loomed a string of those dark wigwams that had interested me in December, and I decided to defect from my companions for a night and (one horseman moving faster than an army) catch up with them next day by shortcuts across the mountains. After lighthearted farewells and shouted rendezvous for drinking together in Serres and Drama and Komotini, I watched them jingle away with their

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114 steel scabbards clinking against their spurs; and then pounded off over the plain toward the hills and the far-sounding goat bells.

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123 When, suddenly, at the heart of a deafening
[361] whirlpool of half-wild dogs, I drew rein at the
[235] camp toward sunset, it turned out to be a *stani* of about fifty huts scattered among the trees around a spring. The whole place was alive with golden evening dust and bleating and barking and bells. The ewes and the she-goats, followed by their shrill young, were being driven with crooks and shouts and ear-sundering whistles and the heckling of dogs into a great semicircular pen of wicker and woven thorns and thatch on a steep slope.
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[234] Once inside, they were herded toward a narrow lych-gate at one end of it, where they were seized by their horns, their tails, or their hind legs, clamped back to front between a shepherd's knees, and milked under protest, a few deft seconds for each captive, into bronze caldrons. Despite my brief acquaintance with Greece, I knew that strange arrivals in country places unloose a friendly hubbub of curiosity and inquisition. Not so here. The aloof drovers doubled the diligence of their tasks; their shouts became louder, the milking more urgent. For the first time, I saw these Biblical men at close range; their black cloaks and their hoods gave them the look of Benedictines who had gone native. There were glimpses, too, of the amazing magpie geometry of the women rising from their dim looms and appearing for a moment in the threshold of the smoke-plumed cones. An authoritative old man with a sweeping mustache and an elaborate crook finally silenced the dogs and asked me what I wanted. I could understand little of what he said; I had spent the two previous months, my first in Greece, in snowy Mount Athos, trying to convert my imperfect ancient Greek into the rudiments of the modern, and the Sarakatsán dialect was a further barrier. When they had gathered that, in spite of patched breeches and puttees, I was not a soldier — no sword or gun! — in fact, a foreigner from England, alone, and too young and as yet unpredatory-looking to be capable of much harm, their reserve began to thaw.

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123 What was going on? They pointed down at
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369 the army glinting across the plain below through its long cocoon of dust, and the blast of a trumpet came softly to our ears. What had all that noise been about, over by the Struma? *Bam-boum-boum? Rat-tat-tat-tat? N'tang n'tang?* I gleaned with surprise from their half-understood questions that they had only the roughest notion of what was afoot. They knew that there had been a *kinima* —

S 123 a movement or revolution — but little more. (It occurs to me now that they may have been pru- K 669 dently waiting to see what sort of bird I was; what tobacco I smoked, as the phrase goes.) It seemed hardly credible that they were unapprised of events which had taken place so few miles away and had split the whole of Greece in two. Anyway, eagerly or ironically, they listened to my stumbling, gesticulating, half ancient and half modern, onomatopoeia-laced pantomime of the tidings: the revolt of half the armed forces in favor of Venizelos, the bombardments in Athens and Attica, the advance of the government forces through Salonika to the Struma River, the battle at the bridge, how the mutinous battleship *Averoff* had sailed away to Crete, how Venizelos himself had fled, probably to Cyprus, while the Macedonian leaders were retreating to Thrace, and perhaps into Bulgaria. A score of hooded nomads had gathered around me, leaning on their crooks and clicking their tongues deprecatingly at the right moments. S 123 When I finished I noticed that their weather-beaten faces, possibly because of amusement at the odd idiom in which this communiqué had been delivered, had lost their sternness; the blue-gray eyes of the beetling despot who had first spoken had assumed a paternal look. "*Eh, paidí, mou,*" he said, with a cheerful expression that clashed with his words, "*kakos einai o polemos.*" ("War's a bad thing, my child.") Then, over his shoulder, he said to the others, "The boy must be hungry." I clambered down, a fair-haired boy took my horse, and another the saddlebags and the saddle and a bag of oats, and we headed through the dusk for the huts.

S [262] By the time we had finished the hot milk with [263] black bread broken into it, and sprinkled with hammered salt — their only food it seemed, which we all spooned in unison out of the same dish — about forty shepherds were eagerly settled, unshod and cross-legged on the spread blankets, nursing their crooks around a fire of thorns in the center of a great domed hut. Half a dozen dogs lay S [272] panting in the dark doorway. The old man was forever pushing, with oak-apple-jointed fingers, a minute saucepan into the embers, and we hissed and gulped in turn over the same small cup of S [276] scalding and bubbling coffee. Another shepherd was busy slicing up handfuls of tobacco leaves on a log with a long knife, then rolling them and politely offering the rough cylinders for the smoker to lick shut and light with a twig. The day's halting saga, the oddity of its language evoking friendly laughter from time to time, was demanded all over again and discussed for hours.

ODD There seemed to be hardly a thing in the hut

353 There seemed to be hardly a thing in the hut
32 that could single out our surroundings for any particular date in the last few millennia, and almost nothing the nomads had not made themselves; either hanging from the lopped and fire-darkened stumps of branches jutting from the hut's timbers, neatly piled against the brushwood walls, or underfoot — guns, tools, choppers, adzes, spades, billhooks, cooking pots, saddles, harness, the tin frills around the icons, and among a pendant grove of dried and shaggy waterskins, a gleaming branchful of new horseshoes. Otherwise, all was hewn and carved wood or homespun from
[251] the backs of their flocks. Aloft, among the sooty twigs and the cobwebs, hung strings of onions, garlic, corncobs, and tobacco leaves. Higher still, the osier-bound reeds of the thatch all converged
123 symmetrically in the apex of the dome. An agreeable and pungent aroma of milk, curds, sweat, goat's hair, tobacco, and woodsmoke filled the place. The thorns on the fire crackled nearly smokelessly, and whenever a new fagot was thrown on, the flames made the tall hut dance in a brief gold concavity above a mob of shadows and lit up the bleached and matted hair and those faces shaped by the blasts of winter and the summer solstice. Their features glittered and flashed like the surfaces on a flint, and whenever my eyes met any of theirs, a smile of welcoming friendliness would answer back.

I had begun to grasp, in the past few weeks, one of the great and uncovenanted delights of Greece; in my case, it was a pre-coming-of-age present. This is a direct and immediate link, friendly and equal on either side, between human beings; something that cuts through barriers of hierarchy and background and money and, except for a few tribal and historic feuds, through politics and nationality as well. It is not a thing that functions in the teeth of convention, but in almost prelapsarian unawareness of its existence. Self-consciousness and awe and condescension (and their baleful remedy of forced egalitarianism) and the feudal hangover and the post-Fall-of-the-Bastille flicker — all the gloomy factors that lame and hobble and limit the range of life and deoxygenate the air of western Europe are absent. Existence, these glances say, is a torment, an enemy, an adventure, and a joke that we are in league to undergo, outwit, exploit, and

123 enjoy on equal terms as accomplices, fellow hedonists and fellow victims. It is exciting for a stranger when he begins to understand that the armor which has been irking him and the arsenal he has been lugging about for half a lifetime are no longer needed. A feeling of miraculous lightness takes their place. On that particular evening this exhilaration was reinforced by other things; my mind was full of the events of the day, the smell of gunpowder, the cannon fire at dawn which had achieved the innocence of fireworks as the bangs had echoed upstream — the first glimpse, in fact, of warfare. By then, I felt I had almost taken part in the battle. The hooves hammering over the loose planks of the bridge still rang in my ears, and the songs on the long ride. On top of this came the beautiful ascent through the foothills, the sunset arrival at the encampment, and now, the voices and laughter and the gold fire-lit masks of the nomads in this hut in the dark mountains, the tiredness of limb, the feeling of being blessedly lost in time and geography with months and years hazily sparkling ahead in a vista of unconjecturable magic. The fusion of all this made it seem that life, at that moment, had nothing more to offer.

533 [123] But it did have something more, and at once. Yorgo, the old man's grandson, who had taken my horse and me under his wing (planning to guide us next morning on a shortcut over the hills to a point where we could swoop down on the army again), fished out a long bone flute. The music that began to hover through the hut was moving and breathless. It started with long and deep notes separated by pauses and then shot aloft in pro-

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tracted patterns of great complexity. Repeated and accelerating trills led on to sustained high notes which left the tune quivering in midair before plummeting an octave to those low and long-drawn initial semibreves. Notes of an icy clarity alternated with notes of a stirring, reedy, and at moments almost rasping hoarseness. Then, after a long breath, they sailed again into limpid and piercing airs of a most touching softness, the same minor phrase recurring with diminishing volume, again and again, until the final high flourishes presaged the protracted bass notes once more, each of them preceded and followed by a lengthening hiatus of silence. One can think of no more apt or more accurate reflection in sound of the mountains and woods and flocks and the nomads' life.

Less lulling music cannot be imagined. But, overcome at last by the day's doings, I must have fallen asleep in the middle of it and been covered with a cloak where I lay. I woke up an hour after midnight to find the hut in the dark except for the embers of the fire and empty of all but the lightly snoring patriarch on the other side. Yorgo's hooded departing back was outlined for a moment in the doorway against the stars. There was a murmur of voices in the cold outside as the shepherds, like monks before the night office, assembled for the first milking; this was the equivalent of matins in their pastoral book of hours. Then silence fell, and after a minute or two, a faint stirring of bells and of waking flocks was hushed by the returning currents of sleep.

Now, a little reluctantly, I must call a halt to these postscripts and flashbacks and return to the point where we began to deviate from the main thread of this narrative among the tassels and the buttoned upholstery of the carriage rocking back with us through the Thracian darkness between Sikarayia and Alexandroupolis.

Not many minutes had passed before the guard worked his perilous way along the duckboard outside and climbed in, not to punch our tickets, but for a chat. We were his only passengers. He was a dark, jovial, round-faced refugee from Smyrna.

"Well," he said cheerfully, offering cigarettes, "did you find out where they hide their pots of gold? Any for me? I could do with it, at this job."

We told him about the wedding. As I had already absorbed one or two hazy notions about the possibility of the extremely ancient descent of the Sarakatsáns, I asked him what he thought.

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"I don't know," he said amiably, "and, what's more, I don't care. I hate the ancient Greeks. We had to learn all about them at school — Plato, Socrates, Pericles, Leonidas, Aristotle, Euripides, Homer, and all that stuff. No, I don't *hate* them, that's too strong. But what have they got to do with me? Perhaps we descend from them, perhaps we don't, what does it matter? And who did they descend from, pray? Nobody knows. They were Greeks, and so are we, that's all we know. I come from Smyrna — there's an ancient Greek city for you — and I may be more Greek than the Greeks in Athens, more Greek than your Sarakatsáns, for all I know. Who cares? I probably do descend from them, but that's not the point. *Greece is an idea*, that's the thing! That's what keeps us together — that, and the language and the country and our history, of course, and the Church; not that I like priests particularly, but we owe them a lot. And those old Greeks, our celebrated ancestors, they're a nuisance, and I'll tell you why. *They haunt us*. We can never be as great as they were, nobody can, and they make us all feel guilty. We can't do anything, people think, because of a few old books and temples and lumps of marble. And clever foreigners who know all about the ancients come here expecting to be surrounded by Heracles and Apollo and Hermes and gentlemen in helmets and laurel leaves, and what do they see? Me — a small dark fat man, half bald, with a mustache and eyes like boot buttons!" He laughed good-naturedly. "To hell with them! Give me the men of the War of Independence who chucked out the Turks; give me Averoff, who presented us with a battleship out of his own pocket; give me Venizelos, who saved us all and turned Greece into a proper country. What's wrong with *them?* If we weren't such fools and always quarreling among ourselves, if we could have no wars or revolutions for fifty years — fifty years, that's all I ask — you'd see what a country we'd become! *Then* we could start worrying about the Trojan horse and working out our relationship to Pericles and finding out whether the Sarakatsáns descend from the ancient Greeks!"

I saw his point, especially about being hampered by eternal comparison with his nebulous and illustrious forerunners. For some, the ancients are a source of inspiration and a matter of vague pride, because the outside world sets so high a price on them; to others they are a perpetual irritation. What about Byzantium? — that's where our traditions date from, a modern Greek may think, not from Pericles holding forth on the Acropolis, not from Diogenes' barrel or the tent of Achilles. What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?

126 *Photographs of the Sarakatsáns by Joan Eyres Monsell.*

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/General information on feasting, dancing, music and drinking, accompanying the Sarakatsani wedding held at Sikarayia will be found in category 585./